

Story 1824 (1973 Tape 1

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Following a Mother's Lead<sup>1</sup>

Once in the past a man went to Yemen to buy some jewelry which he could resell in his own country at a good profit. While he was in Yemen he boarded in the home of a widow who had a beautiful daughter. The man fell in love with this girl and wished to marry her. The girl's widowed mother was very poor, and she was a harlot, a situation which the daughter knew about. It was not very difficult for the man to persuade the woman to give him her daughter in marriage. A wedding was held, and the two became man and wife.

Some time passed after their wedding, and then the man said to his mother-in-law, "Please permit us to leave now and go to my country. After I have bought some jewelry,

<sup>1</sup> This is an exemplum and an interpolated story that appeared in a much longer ATON tale, Tale 1041. In order not to lose all track of this moralistic little narrative, we have here given it separate status so that it will be identifiable (and thus made accessible) through the Title Index of ATON and through the ATON catalogue.

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allow my wife and me to go to my country. I have a house back there, and I do not know what condition it may have fallen into during my absence."

She said, "All right. Have a good trip," and she saw them off.

Mounting two camels, they set out on the long journey that lay ahead of them. After they had gone some distance, they came to a narrow bridge over a river on their route. The man's camel, which was leading, refused to cross the bridge. His wife said to him, "If my camel crosses first, then yours will follow it."

So they changed places, and the woman said to her camel, "Deh!"<sup>2</sup> In that way they crossed the river easily, and the man was relieved that they had solved their difficulty. After thinking about it for a few minutes, however, he asked his wife, "How did you know that my camel would follow yours across the bridge?"

"That is something you could not have known. My camel is your camel's mother."

<sup>2</sup>In giving directions to beasts of burden, Turks say deh for the English giddap and choosh for the English whoa.

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After she said that, he thought about her remark, then he asked her a question. "Will you follow your mother? I know what she is doing."

His wife said, "If I sucked my mother's bad milk,<sup>3</sup> bad milk will surely affect me, of course, and so I shall follow my mother even if I don't want to do so."

Hearing that, the man changed his mind about his wife and decided to send her back to her mother. As they parted, she said, "If my inheritance is bad, I shall pursue the wrong way. On the other hand, if I sucked my mother's good milk, don't worry about me. Entrust me to and go your way without thinking any further about me."

<sup>3</sup>Sometimes bad milk refers simply to some supposedly negative heritable trait. In some Turkish tales, however, it has a narrower context. If a nursing mother has adulterous intercourse, her milk is said to be bad milk and will affect in some undesirable way the character of the offspring.